PROGRESS IN THE APPLE INDUSTRY

A radio talk by Dr. W. A. Taylor, Chief of the Bureau of Plant Industry, delivered through WRC and 15 other stations associated with the National Broadcasting Company, at 1:15 p. m., Friday, March 22, 1929.

Throughout the larger part of Europe and most of the occupied portions of North America, the apple is the leading fruit. Native in the temperate region forests of Asia and Europe, its cultivation and varietal improvement appear to have been closely associated with the westward spread of what we term civilization. Brought both as seeds and young trees to our eastern settlements by the early colonists among their most cherished possessions, the apple soon became an important item in the food supply. There developed so great a number of cultural varieties, covering so wide a range of quality, through so long a ripening season, that it promptly became the dominant fruit both for home use and commercial production in the northern and eastern portions of the country.

During the present century, as improved transportation and storage facilities and practice have made it possible to ship the more perishable fruits from distant and warmer producing regions, the apple has been forced to yield in some measure its commercial preeminence in the keen competition for the consumer's dollar. But the names of more of its choice varieties still are household words in America than of any other fruit. Practically all of the extensively grown and commercially important sorts are varieties of North American origin, well adapted to our widely varying climatic and soil conditions and acceptable to the American eye and tongue in beauty and palatability.

The time when rapid increase in number of apple varieties, acreage of orchards or even in millions of bushels of fruit per annum was indicative of the soundest progress in our apple industry or of the prosperity of the apple grower, passed some years ago, however. This became evident when too frequently recurring bumper crops of fruit, much too large for the accessible consuming demand, demonstrated that unrestrained orchard planting enthusiasm had overshot the mark of economic soundness. So when the Census of 1925 showed that the number of apple trees of bearing age in orchards in the United States was nearly one-third less than in 1910 and the number of nonbearing trees nearly one-half less, the seeming retrogression was, in fact, an indication of readjustment along sound economic lines. A similar indication is found in the gradual increase in the percentage of the total crop which is classified as commercial in contrast with the farm crop, of which under ordinary conditions there is heavy wastage, often because of indifferent quality or of relatively undesirable varieties.

Geographically, the decrease of acreage and production has occurred mainly in the non-commercial farm orchard regions where crops are at best rather infrequent, and through the elimination of orchards badly located as to soil or climatic conditions. The net result is that fewer trees under better cultural and pest control practice are yielding larger and better crops of fruit than twenty years ago, with less frequent crop failures in most sections. With the less desirable varieties gradually

eliminated either by pulling out of trees or top grafting, better standardization of grade and pack becomes possible, also more effective concentration of advertising effort to interest consumers in high grade offerings of obtainable varieties. Market improvement in control of insect pests and plant diseases affecting the apple has resulted from the very effective work of the plant pathologists and entomologists of the Department of Agriculture and the state experiment stations, ably seconded by the agricultural extension forces and supplemented by the commercial manufacturers of insecticides and fungicides and of machinery for their application. As a result, we have available for consumption on our domestic markets and for export to other countries a much larger proportion of attractive and wholesome fruit than in earlier times.

The recent development of an effective method of controlling apple scald has materially lengthened the season during which certain otherwise desirable varieties can be marketed in satisfactory condition. Still more recent development of practical methods of cleaning the fruit from excessive spray residue by washing it with acidulated water or a dilute solution of alkali has simplified a rather ominous marketing situation which existed a year or two ago. This is of special and immediate importance in the far west and northwest where this method of cleansing was applied to approximately 30,000 carloads of the crop of 1928 under a wide range of conditions with very satisfactory results, and appears destined to be adopted for winter fruit generally where heavy residues remain at harvesting time.

What are the essentials for the future well-being of the industry? Some of them may be summarized:

1. Stabilize annual production and improve average quality by better cultural, pruning and pest control practices;

2. Eliminate from commercial orchards as rapidly as practicable varieties of inferior quality and unattractive appearance;

3. Refrain from planting additional acreage, except of most desirable varieties on surecrop sites where production costs are low or market quality unusually high;

4. Grade rigidly, handle carefully, pack tight, store promptly, sell effectively;

5. For the small scale grower in the more important producing districts, the last item may sound like cooperation. That is in fact what is indicated in many sections as the best bet in apple marketing.